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AUTHOR Fiala, Barbara
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ABSTRACT

Based on the idea that drama infuses the classroom with activity, imagination, language, and powerful learning experiences, this journal offers commentary and suggestions on classroom drama practices at the elementary level. The first section argues that drama motivates self-active learning and promotes language development, learning across the curriculum, and overall cognitive development. The second section discusses how oral activities include elements of drama, lists the five communication functions, presents optional preliminaries to drama activities, and suggests drama games. Activities that prepare children for improvisation, such as play with objects and puppets, moving to sound, mime, guessing games, and charades are included in the third section. The fourth section presents the following improvising and role playing activities: play making, improvising from minimal directions, and improvising in the subject areas. The fifth section defines dance drama and answers some basic questions about how to introduce it to a class, what music to use, how to progress, and how to relate it to other school work. Focusing on scripts and performances, the final section discusses helping children with scripting, ways to use scripted plays, and the details of putting on a school drama festival and staging a play. (JD)

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P.E.N. 15
PRIMARY ENGLISH NOTES . . .
Classroom Notes . . . from the Primary English Teaching Association

Spotlighting CLASSROOM DRAMA

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The Powerful Case for More Classroom Drama...

Drama Offers Us So Much

If we wish to infuse our classrooms with activity, imagination, language, and whole, close-to-life learning experiences, then no other method has more to offer than drama; and none offers more enjoyment. Children respond to it enthusiastically because of its active play element, but also because it helps them to come to grips with the 'internal theatre' of fantasy and imagination.

Children Become Self-active Learners

Typically, after discussion with the class or a group, the teacher provides a problem (or 'situation'). It serves to *involve* the children as self-active learners in improvising/inventing/discovering ways to handle the problem. This, surely, is superior to teacher-centred instruction. The teacher then need only step forward to extend the problem or extend awareness if the self-generative force of the situation lags.

All-round Child Growth Is Promoted

By placing children in problem situations or in personality roles, classroom drama challenges them to rise above their accustomed self-absorption (egocentricity). Acting out other people's roles and problems, they begin to see other points of view — and so they grow in understanding, an all-round growth, sensitive to people and life-problems.

Drama Lifts Language Learning

Stimulated by drama, children speak a good deal of language that would otherwise remain only latent, unrealised, as a passive stock of heard/read words. No wonder several significant research studies establish that regular classroom drama produces marked gains in oral language and also in reading and writing. (See 'Using Drama,' in *Language Arts*, NCTE of USA, March 1979)

It Promotes Learning Across-the-Curriculum

Drama helps notably at three curriculum levels: in the concentrated language teaching of English, it promotes talking/listening/reading/writing; in the wider concern for language right across-the-curriculum, it has uses in every subject without exception; and in the primary school's concern for the 'related arts', it can integrate the language arts with non-language arts and crafts.

And It Is So Instantly Available!

Most classroom drama needs no expensive props or costumes. All it needs is the teacher's appreciation of its worth in learning and the easily acquired skill of deftly leading children into dramatic situations as opportunities arise in ongoing work ... 'Now let's set this up as a scene! How would Captain Cook ... '

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GETTING STARTED

Where to Start?

There is no 'correct' sequence. Work in drama is essentially ungraded. Children in every year, K-7, might successfully enact Captain Cook's arrival in Australia, using a variety of dramatic forms. The difference, year by year, would arise from the maturing knowledge, understanding and personalities of the children. In looking over the possible dramatic forms discussed below, the teacher will work from what seems comfortable and likely to succeed, having regard to one's own experience and one's estimate of the children's capacity. *In drama, as in teaching generally, everyone must evolve a personal teaching style .*

Oral Activities Include Elements of Drama

Where is the line between life and drama? Any capturing of attention may be regarded as dramatic, and certainly any conflict —perhaps, even, anything done with style. Merely to list 'oral activities' is to realise that they *can* be 'dramatic'. So teachers need to value and point to the dramatic component in, for example —

☐ conversation	☐ debating	☐ reporting
☐ discussion	☐ arguing	☐ interviewing
☐ describing	☐ prosecuting	☐ announcing
☐ demonstrating	☐ defending	☐ broadcasting
☐ lecturing	☐ criticising	☐ joking
☐ public speaking	☐ denouncing	☐ compering

At an even more basic level, consider that a dramatic component can infuse *all* communication. Here, for instance, is a very useful grouping of 'communication functions' into just five families:

The Five Communication Functions

1. Controlling ... (A person may) command, threaten, prohibit, warn, urge, direct, insist, offer, suggest, hint, refuse, disallow, reject, restrict, limit, etc.

2. Feeling ... (expressing or responding)

(a) positive: expressions/responses of appreciation

(b) negative: expressions/responses of disappointment.

3. Informing ... (offering or seeking information) question, answer, tell, explain, demonstrate, lecture, point out, name, define, prove, acknowledge, admit, agree, justify, excuse, etc.

4. Ritualising ... (simply facilitating social interaction) greeting, farewelling, exchanging social pleasantries, contributing out of politeness to a conversation, playing socially approved language 'games' such as punning, wisecracking, teasing,etc.

5. Imagining ... (contributing to an exercise of imagination) guess, speculate, theorise, make assumptions, predict, hypothesise, fictionalise, fantasise, role-play, mock-up, etc.

Use the Five Functions for simple dramatic oral activities, e.g. put some of the above words on cards, one per card, hand them out, announce a theme, then ask each child to make up and speak appropriately a relevant sentence. (e.g. Theme, 'TV'; word, COMMAND; sentence, 'Tony, turn off the TV at once or you won't get any breakfast!'; the other children then guess who Tony is role-playing.)

Optional Preliminaries to Drama Activities

Some teachers begin a drama session (or any major learning session) with relaxation or warm-up or concentration preliminaries; others don't.

Relaxation: do some deep breathing; or yawning and stretching; or stretch tall, then flop; or lie flat and feel flopped like a rag doll; etc.

Warm-up: jog; or run on the spot or in a circle; or follow the teacher in limbering movements; etc.

Concentration: play 'O'Grady says' (or 'Simon says'); or, in pairs, toss an imaginary ball; or one acts while the other 'mirrors'; or close eyes and listen; etc.

Today's teacher takes part in drama activities with the children—removes shoes, undertakes roles and, if need be, 'gets down on all fours with the kids' ... and has as much fun as they do!

Drama Games

Children naturally 'play' and 'make up games' or they conform with traditional games. Teachers of junior classes sometimes ask children to demonstrate games that are played at home. Brian Fone has described a wide variety of games under these heads:

☐ warm-up games	☐ area exercises
☐ rhythm games	☐ circle games
☐ instruction games	☐ concentration games
☐ word games	(See PETA's *The New English — How To!*, 1976, pp. 130-8.)

MOVING CONFIDENTLY AHEAD

Play with Objects, Toys

Before children can improvise with assurance from a minimal situation or problem, they are stimulated by an object or toy around which their imaginations can play. Classrooms need to be well-stocked with a diversity of such objects. Young children at first simply play with them. Their drama is undirected play. Later, they can be encouraged to make up plays based on one or more objects; and after some whole-class demonstrations they can try working in small groups. (See 'Play Making' below.) A teacher's 'box of tricks' might include:

- ☐ a large beautiful seashell
- ☐ strings of beads, shiny and coloured
- ☐ a clown doll, floppy and crazy
- ☐ a koala and other soft toys
- ☐ dolls from many countries
- ☐ hats of a chef, policeman, fireman, etc.
- ☐ cups, saucers, cooking utensils
- ☐ handbags, high-heel shoes, spectacles, etc.
- ☐ all manner of dressing-up materials
- ☐ things to climb on, stand on, hide in.

Play with Puppets

All children love puppetry. Shy ones will sooner work with puppets then engage directly in dramatic activities. They may move from undirected play with objects and toys to the 'mask' of puppetry and thus feel their way into confident, open improvising. They will also be helped by the great amount of 'task talk' that usually precedes a puppet performance. (Many books tell how to make a puppet stage and a variety of puppets.)

Moving to Sound

Children need regular opportunities to move to sound — and love to do so. This is the beginning of dance drama (see p. 5), and even in elemental forms it is very beneficial. The sound can be:

- ☐ clapping of hands; tapping a stick
- ☐ beating a drum; shaking a tambourine
- ☐ playing a recorder, pipes or whistles
- ☐ playing a piano or guitar
- ☐ playing recorded music

Vary the volume, speed and rhythm to build up a repertory of body movements, e.g.

- ☐ walk, march, skip, hop, jump, tiptoe
- ☐ mooch, amble, hesitate, go cautiously
- ☐ push, pull, stretch, crouch
- ☐ go sideways like a crab; hop like a frog
- ☐ use graceful hand movements (Balinese style)

Mime

Strictly, mime is 'imitating anything without using words' or it is 'silent role-play'. Children can enjoy some of this, e.g.

- ☐ washing my hair; sharing a watermelon
- ☐ a man shaving; a woman putting on make-up
- ☐ drinking nasty medicine; cleaning false teeth
- ☐ making a bed; hanging a picture on a wall

Or the whole class can mime large scenes, e.g.

- ☐ people eating lunch in a public park
- ☐ people fishing from a wharf or launch
- ☐ people shopping in a supermarket

But some teachers question the value of any more than a little pure mime. They feel we are in the language-promoting business, in competition with passivity-induced TV. So they allow language which arises spontaneously, or they positively encourage it.

Guessing Games and Charades

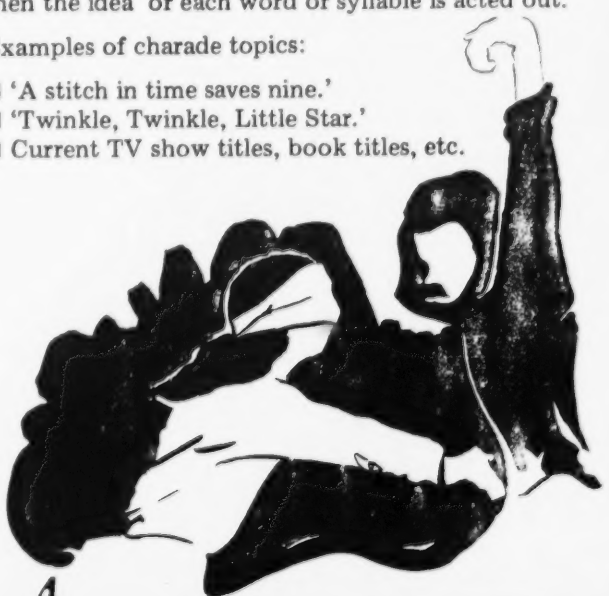
Related to mime, but requiring an audience, these are games of 'What am I doing?' or 'Who am I?' The teacher may hand out directions on cards, or whisper directions to younger children. Most of the actions for miming (above) are appropriate to these games.

Charades are a little different — they are the non-verbal acting out of phrases, titles or quotations which the audience tries to guess. (Charades are not usually attempted below Year 4, and then only after practice in mime and guessing games.)

By degrees a class builds up a stock of agreed symbolic actions. The charade begins with defining of the area (TV show, proverb, song title, etc.), then the idea or each word or syllable is acted out.

Examples of charade topics:

- ☐ 'A stitch in time saves nine.'
- ☐ 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.'
- ☐ Current TV show titles, book titles, etc.



IMPROVISING and ROLE-PLAYING

Improvisation and Role-play

Improvisation is the working up of a dramatic piece from an idea, a story, a sketchy plot, a problem, 'minimum directions' — indeed from any stimulus. It is dramatic invention without a script (though out of it a script may emerge).

Role-playing is an integral part of improvisation and of all other dramatic activity, for the nature of drama is the casting of players/participants/actors in roles. This is obvious to us when we enact another person, but each of us is also likely to take on different roles in order to handle different situations. Children can discuss this by considering their own 'roles' in playground, classroom, home, and neighbourhood, not to mention the 'internal' roles of fantasy.

Subjects for improvisation under the broad heading of 'educational drama' may arise from the children's own personal experiences, from stories and poems, from social problems, and from any situation found in a school subject, e.g. Cook's discovery of the east coast of Australia. Let's look at three common forms taken by improvisation ...

1. Play Making

Here is a teacher describing her approach:

'Either we make a play from a much loved story or poem or from an original stimulus — an object, toy, experience or just exciting words. I gather the children around me in a corner of an open acting space. Shoes and coats off! We talk. I question. An incident emerges. Then we talk up a story-line. Talk, talk, talk till the time is right for some brief mime or enactment.

'Changes to the story-line keep being devised. Good! Creativity is bubbling. I usually then divide the class into small groups to complete making the play. I allow each much latitude. The variations are most interesting when we come to classroom performance.

'The process can of course spread over two or more days. Usually it also extends into related activities such as writing and all sorts of art/craft work. Because TV conditioning of children's minds is so strong, I urge the value of original work at all stages — "a play of our very own, that no one has ever seen or heard before." '

2. Improvising from 'Minimum Directions'

When children have gained experience through the many simple dramatic forms, they can be put into 'situations' or 'problems' by means of 'minimum directions' given orally by the teacher or on activity cards. Experience in play making (1. above) will obviously help enormously, especially in working cooperatively with a small group.

A possible method ... (a) Teacher presents the directions. (b) Group or class discuss it, i.e. 'task talk'. (c) Action and dialogue and more task talk proceed. (d) Teacher intervenes with suggestions and questions only when the impetus slows ... Examples of topics:

- ☐ in pairs, take the roles of interviewer and VIP.
- ☐ in pairs, conduct a brotherly/sisterly argument.
- ☐ explain to parents how you got into a fight.
- ☐ deputation urges 4-day school week on principal.
- ☐ group catches shoplifter, questions him/her.
- ☐ parents discuss their troublesome children.
- ☐ a migrant family discuss Australians.

3. Improvising in the Subject Areas

From the broad social issues of 2. above, improvisation needs to be consciously extended to lessons in the subject areas — to all subjects, without exception. Here are three approaches ...

(i) Pause to Dramatise Simple Points in Ongoing Work

Everyone agrees that a teacher's lecture-type exposition is not very effective. Alternatives to it should include pausing frequently to get children moving in various ways, from mime to small group improvisations.

(ii) Dramatise to Overcome Abstraction

Everyone agrees that there is too much unreality and abstraction in school subjects. Drama can introduce some reality if children play out the (a) historical aspects (b) concepts (c) procedures of subjects, e.g. in Maths —

- ☐ improvise primitive man's reasons for counting
- ☐ improvise to illustrate the term 'subtract'
- ☐ improvise to build up the concept 'calculate'
- ☐ improvise to demonstrate 'division' (sharing).

(use the list of 'size words' on p.5, *P.E.N. 14*)

(iii) Sometimes Dramatise Large Units of Subjects

Continuing the example of Maths: the classroom can become a shop or supermarket to dramatise the uses of money and calculation. Or, as a travel agency, it can deal with distances and fares, then extend to geography, cultures of other lands, etc.

A whole unit or theme can be drama based. Thus a teacher's theme on medieval times focused on 'King Arthur — Fact or Fiction?' Dramatic improvisation underlay its strands of literature, social studies, science, maths, health, physical education, written expression, music, art and craft. After the loosely correlated activities which made up most of the unit, there was an integrative culmination in 'play making', which led to scripting, rehearsal and performance before the whole school.

DANCE DRAMA

What Exactly Is It?

It is *something* that is variously called Dance Drama/Creative Dance/Dance Making/Movement. The name is unimportant! What matters is getting children moving to sound (see p. 3.), beginning with the simplest self-expression and developing, one hopes, to artistic forms of dance. Because we believe it does splendid things for children's bodies and souls (and teachers' too!) we answer here the questions often asked about it ... THERE SHOULD BE MORE OF IT!

1. Is an Assembly Hall or Large Space Needed?

No. The classroom will do; or a secluded corner of the playground; or space behind a building. At first, indeed, many children fear too much space — and they are more easily controlled in small areas.

So,clear and stack the classroom furniture. You can even make this movement a dramatic occasion — as by pretending to be thieves stealing TV sets and radios from a warehouse at night. (Brian Way's *Development through Drama* suggests thirty other ways to dramatically clear a space.)

2. How Do I Cope with Self-conscious Children?

The teacher's example is infectious. Look confident yourself. Above all, join in (including removal of coat and shoes).

In the early stages, guarantee your class privacy, away from other classes or adults. Start with simple activities that all can do. They will only feel secure in foot movements if you get them to remove shoes *and* socks. And gentle the lagging ones along.

3. How Do I Cope with 'Playing Up'?

The problem sometimes lies in lack of a clear lead from the teacher. Confidence plus clear directions on the teacher's part will minimise disorder. On the other hand, a teacher who merely plays a record and says vaguely, 'Create!' or 'Go on, do something!' may expect a confused response.

Especially, older primary children, self-conscious of their bodies, need to *feel* a teacher's enthusiasm, to *hear* what is to be done, and if necessary to *see* new movements demonstrated. (Then war games or simulation of TV violence won't appear.)

4. How Do I Find Where to Start?

Don't read too much — start simply, trust intuition. Many books are available. For the inexperienced teacher, any one of these three would enable a start to be made. Janelle Cust's *Creative Dance*, Pam Farley's *Teacher's Guide to Creative Dance*, or Joan Russell's *Creative Dance in the Primary School.* For more advanced classes, consult Barbara Mettler's *Materials of Dance as a Creative Art Activity.* Best of all, attend an in-service course.

5. Where Do I Find the Right Music?

To start, you don't even need music. You can develop awareness of *sound* — especially voices, but also wind, rain, traffic, birds, whistling, etc. Or use a variety of percussion instruments.

Choice of music is personal — so the best thing is to start collecting your own. Anyway, other people's lists are out of date as soon as they are printed. Why not start listening more discriminatingly to radio, and tape or note the names of suitable pieces? (Two cautions: familiar ballet tunes can produce repetitive 'story-telling'; pop and disco tracks, including children's donations from home, usually have repetitive go-go movements.)

6. What Progression Could I Make?

Many approaches to dance are possible. In general, however, the aim is to get the children moving joyfully and then proceed to build up a 'vocabulary' of movement through which they can express themselves.

The books suggested above — or many others — will show how to use the body; space; time; weight; how to combine parts of the body; how to work in pairs; how to experiment with levels, directions; how to use movement words and emotion words.

7. Can Dance Relate to Other School Work?

Today's thematic emphasis presents boundless opportunities, e.g. 'The Sea' ... Start with words and movement: *run* from waves, *paddle* in shallows, *plunge* into breakers; move to other words on the deck of a storm-tossed ship; move to the moods of breezes and winds at sea, etc.; move to recitation and choral readings of poems, Hart-Smith's 'The Beach', Reeves' 'The Sea', etc.; locate and use music about the sea; as an advanced activity, dramatise-with-dance extracts from Arnold's poem, 'The Forsaken Merman'.

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SCRIPTS and PERFORMANCES

From Improvisation to Script

In a sense, all plays, from Shakespeare's down, have come out of improvisation. The playwright, relying on long experience of drama, carries out the improvising in imagination while drafting and re-drafting till a polished script emerges. Children, with so much less experience, work up their improvisations in action, and when at last they attain some polish they may commit their play to paper — it becomes a 'scripted drama'.

Helping Children with Scripting

Teachers who are skilful at assisting children in play making will have little difficulty in moving them on to the writing of a script. But teachers who have not done this can easily underestimate the difficulty of writing a play. On no account should children be just 'thrown in at the deep end'.

One way to proceed painlessly is to give children picture books (e.g. of myths simply told) so that structure, climax and setting are provided. The child then uses his or her own words in writing the story in play form.

Make Many Scripts Available

Every classroom library needs its section for scripted plays. Many good anthologies are available. To these can be added plays from reading schemes, school magazines, and the best plays written in previous years by children themselves. Of course, the emphasis will be on short plays, suited to Years 3-6.

Ways to Use Scripted Plays

1. **Self-chosen Reading.** Encourage children to include a play sometimes in their self-chosen reading — and show your approval whenever some spontaneous dramatising is reported, e.g. at home.

2. **'Readers' Theatre'.** This is simply a group reading in a circle, with emphasis on good articulation and the expression of roles through effective reading. Rehearsals will make presentation to an audience possible.

3. **'Radio or TV Theatre'.** This is similar to 'Readers' Theatre', but music and sound effects and an announcer can be added.

4. **'Book-in-Hand'.** This adds movement to a reading though it does not attempt a full performance. There is movement within an improvised 'stage' area, and perhaps a few props.

5. **Performance.** (See next col.)

Brian Way, *Development through Drama* (Longmans, Lond. 1967)
Eddie Errington, *A Time and a Place* (Primary Education, Melb. 1978)
Joan Miller, *Springboards* (Nelson, Melb. 1978)
Anna Scher, *101 Ideas in Drama* (Heinemann, Melb. 1975)
London Drama Assn, *Drama Guidelines* (Heinemann, Melb. 1977)

Performance Drama

Children are fortunate who see a great deal of live theatre in their primary years.

- Teachers may take them to live shows.
- Principals may bring theatre groups to school.
- Parents may be encouraged to take the whole family to plays, pantomimes, musicals.

A School Drama Festival?

There is general agreement that the heart of 'educational drama' is the 'classroom drama' we have been discussing. But many schools also feel there is room for a school drama festival at the end of the year — as long as it is not seen as the purpose towards which classroom drama is directed. On the contrary, classroom drama is its own art form, valuable for its own sake and for the learning it achieves.

Planning a Festival

The school staff will probably plan the festival during Second Term with attention to program variety, stage management and publicity. Each teacher then has time to start gathering props, costumes, and music. Rehearsals, however, should not begin too early in Third Term, for fear of boredom setting in among the children.

Staging a Play

Children are usually very keen to learn and take part in the 'stage craft' that lies behind a performance ...

- The roles of producer, stage manager, prompter.
- The discipline of rehearsals.
- Speaking on stage — using the voice to reveal character and mood — projecting the voice and speaking towards the audience.
- Movement on stage — moving to convey character — positioning, grouping, entering, exiting.
- Making sound effects — experimenting to achieve realism — selecting music — cueing.
- Arranging special effects — mainly lighting, but also clouds, cyclorama, slide-projection, etc.
- Costumes — making them, finding them, even sometimes hiring them — and putting someone in charge of the 'costume box'.
- Make-up — how to use a kit and how to make up 'character'.
- Scenery — designing and making it.
- Props — a 'props box', and someone in charge.